

Oral History of a Living Veteran

Oral history is the systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences, *in their own words*. We'll read published collections of oral histories from WWII, Vietnam, and Iraq veterans, but you'll supplement these readings with creating an audio or video oral history of someone you've met in person.

- **As an individual or in a pair**, contact a living combat veteran in order to collect stories about his/her service experiences. This person can be known to you prior to the project (or even a family member) but must not have previously spoken at length with you regarding their memories of combat. Ask the dates and places of their service for preliminary research.
- Make arrangements to speak at least one hour in a quiet comfortable environment: a local library, home setting, or school location. You will need time to allow time to build trust.
- Conduct short background research to establish your own baseline knowledge of the situations your interviewee is likely to have encountered. Know what war they fought in, where they served, when.
- Compile a list of questions/topics you'd like to bring up, especially if the interviewee has a hard time getting started talking. You may replace with follow-ups, but have something to fall back on.
- Make sure the interviewee knows they'll be recorded and how you'll use the information.
- **Use a voice recorder or video camera, in addition to written notes to refer back to when you need to edit.** You may find taking notes intrusive to forming a connection with the person; in a pair, one partner can lead conversation while the other manages recording. I have two voice recorders and one video camera which I can loan out given adequate lead time.
- Plan to ask open questions without easy 'yes' 'no' answers. Start with less probing questions as you build a connection with your interviewee, then moving into more probing questions as trust builds. Please be aware of the psychological factors at work during the interview; it's possible your interviewee may be remembering things long put aside. Allow for silences as they process these memories. End your interview with lighter talk, not intense personal memories.
- Take photos/"B-roll" footage to use for cutaways that establish context of the person in their environment and illustrates points they might have made in their responses OR borrow their own photographs (be sure to return promptly in good condition) to scan and use within audio or video product. Document all sources of information and credit appropriately in the credits!
- Upon conclusion of the interview, send a thank you note.
- Review your tapes and edit to create a strong narrative sense and to SYNTHESIZE the most important themes that emerge. There will NOT be enough time to include everything, so filter for what details/themes would be most useful to share
- Provide some kind of context for the person's service at the beginning of the oral history: brief historical notes with maps if appropriate, a statement about the person's service, position, current situation, or location of interview.

Tips from previous students

- Pick an interesting 'character' who is relatively comfortable talking with you
- Take every interview seriously – you don't know when they'll say something interesting
- Do your best to get the best possible lighting situation
- Listen to the room before filming to identify any distracting sounds that could be eliminated
- Tripod is best for sit-down interview
- Make sure interviewee is not looking straight at camera – arrange for a comfortable angle
- Make sure interviewee puts context of question in their answer
- LISTEN LISTEN LISTEN for opportunities to ask follow-up questions

End products:

- Three to five minute audio or video segment that highlights this veteran's war experience, discussion of impacts on current life, and reflections about the meaning of service.
- One page reflecting on the veteran, the interview experience, and connections to class discussions.

GRADING RUBRIC – Veteran's Interview

Original Thinking

- Shows evidence of careful editing to enhance communication of information
- Splices together excerpted dialogue from longer interview to tell best story

Support, Details, and Evidence

- Uses B-Roll footage or still images for video / sound effects or music for audio to establish context, deepen meaning, and provide for transitions
- Audio/Video is between 3-5 minutes long
- Includes one-page written reflection about the interview experience, insights gained, and connections to class discussions

Organization and Clarity

- Addresses jump-cuts, changes in sound quality, interviewee disfluencies for polished product
- Creates clear narrative story which leads the viewer through the material

<i>Grading:</i>	A	Work surpasses some/all criteria, demonstrates superior thoughtfulness
	B	Work capably meets all criteria
	C	Work meets some of the criteria
	D/F	Criteria has not been met

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